

Sunday's meeting in the Holy Land serves to recognize mutual respect and admiration between the two churches that was reignited 50 years ago. It is fitting that it takes place at the birthplace of Christianity: Jerusalem.

I commend the leadership of Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who both glorify God and demonstrate that Christianity is characterized by love, peace, and compassion.

HONORING OUR VETERANS

(Ms. JACKSON LEE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, all that we do and all that America does is owed to the greatness of our Constitution and to men and women whom we will honor this coming Monday, Memorial Day.

I call today upon Americans, wherever they may be, to stop for a moment to honor them.

A few years ago, I passed unanimous legislation on this floor to honor all of those who had ever served in combat. But we honor those who fell in the line of duty. This coming week, we will remember them, as we should every year.

As I go home, I will be visiting one of my veterans hospitals to be reminded of those who still stand, and to commit that we will fix every problem that denies or undermines the health care system of our veterans.

I have introduced the Heroes Act to ensure that veterans who have gained many good skills in service can equate those skills to civilian work, that they are treated with respect and dignity as managers and leaders, because that is what they were when they served in the United States military.

And so we honor our fallen soldiers and their families. We will gather today as Americans this weekend. We will stand united under the flag, saying thank you, for you have told all of us that freedom is not free.

□ 1300

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT AND CURRENT EVENTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2013, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to comment about the work done on the National Defense Authorization Act. I know Chairman McKEON has done a tremendous amount of work. I know, from dealing with him during this work on the defense budget, it has been extremely difficult for him.

I remain concerned where we have an administration that has kept our people in Afghanistan with less than favorable rules of engagement, where we

have people in harm's way and constantly being called on to be alert, be in positions where they may be in harm's way; and, yet, the authorization ends up being \$45 billion less than the President's own projection for fiscal year 2014 budget request, and \$30.7 billion less than that, that was enacted for fiscal year 2014 in the NDAA Public Law 113-66.

Back in the summer of 2011, I told our leadership that the deficit was a major problem, of course, as all of our conference realizes, as those on the other side of the aisle used to talk about until they got into the majority and blew the lid off the deficit.

To raise the debt ceiling, set up a supercommittee that I knew was going to fail, said it was going to fail because the Senate Democrats would never allow an agreement because they wanted to be able to blame Republicans for not getting a deal.

The mainstream media always buys whatever they said, even when they shut down the government, as HARRY REID did last September 30th, by refusing to take up even the most extreme compromises that this House was willing to make.

So they know they will get coverage from the mainstream media, and even some amazing examples of complete abandonment of any type of journalistic integrity. They knew they would be protected.

So they did refuse to allow an agreement. Even when Senators—Republican Senators reached out, indications were they thought they could get a deal, but I knew they were not going to allow the supercommittee to reach an agreement, no matter how far they bent over backwards, and that is what happened.

That meant the sequestration would occur. I had no problem with the amount of cuts in the sequestration. I had a problem with the number one job of the Federal Government, being to provide for the common defense, taking the biggest devastating hit in the sequestration. That was the problem.

So, because of that, I am still very concerned about the massive cuts to our defense when we are more hated than ever, trusted less than ever. Our previous friends are now reaching out to China and Russia because they can't trust us.

In trips abroad—I know the administration doesn't like Members of Congress to go abroad because we end up talking directly to people and finding out what they really think, so we don't get indirect misrepresentation, and you find out around the world, people don't trust this administration.

Our allies are saying: Are we going to be the next ally that you throw away, as you have been doing in recent years under this administration?

As I have said before, the elderly African in West Africa who told me how excited they were when we elected our first African American President, but ever since he had been President, he

said, the United States keeps getting weaker and weaker, and you have got to stop. Please tell the people in Washington to stop allowing the United States to get weaker.

As Christians, they knew, they said, where they would go when this life was over, but their hope, he said, for a more safe and free life here, even for a West African, would be when the United States does not get weaker, but stands against tyranny and stands against any threat.

Like Boko Haram, that threatens innocent Christians anywhere, it will ultimately be a threat to Christians everywhere.

I am also very concerned, as one who believes, as Abraham Lincoln says, as is inscribed in the north wall of the Lincoln Memorial, as part of his second inaugural address, that, as he quoted from scripture:

The judgments of the Lord are just and righteous altogether.

I am very concerned that, when our Nation is the most powerful Nation in the world, at the time when Christian persecutions, by number—not necessarily by percentage, but by number—are probably the greatest they have ever been in the history of the world, since Jesus was on earth, and we do nothing except watch the persecutions grow and grow, there will ultimately be some accountability if, as Abraham Lincoln said, as he and I believe, the judgments of the Lord are just and righteous altogether.

When someone is given much, of them, much is expected. We have an obligation. We have been put in a position where we can stand up for righteousness.

It did take a while for this Nation to get to the point where the Constitution meant exactly what it said, but what helped us get there was what was originally in the Declaration of Independence, a belief that we are endowed by our Creator, not endowed by government, not endowed by a monarch, but we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights.

When we fail to acknowledge that Creator, when we fail to stand up for those who acknowledge the Creator, when we fail to stand up and provide for the common defense, then there will be a price to pay.

Israel is feeling it. The mainstream media doesn't talk about it. Israel doesn't want to be considered a whiner, but they are being constantly under attack from rockets. Why? Because they are Jews and because they are in the Middle East, in the same location that was called the Promised Land where, around 1,600 years or so before Muhammad lived, King David was ruling in the land where they now are, and in the location, in Hebron, for example, where he ruled the first 7 years as King of Israel.

Some say, well, clearly, that is not Israeli land. People that worship Muhammad that came along 1,600 years after Christ—I'm sorry—after King

David was ruling in that town or 600 years or so after Christ, then, surely, they have a better claim; yet we tell Israel that they have to constantly be giving up and even to have our Secretary of State saying that they are guilty of apartheid, they are risking that guilt if they don't do everything that our Secretary of State says, where he has previously warned that, if they don't do what Secretary Kerry said, they may bring another wave of murder upon themselves. It sounded like a threat.

There are consequences for leaders who put our friends in jeopardy, and for those that think, well, just because we have leaders making bad statements, making bad decisions, doesn't mean it will reflect on us in the country, but for those who believe what is in the Bible, as the huge majority did, of our Founders, those who wrote translations of the Bible, those who taught Sunday school—one of the Founders started the Sunday school movement in America.

It is amazing the strength of ties. Even though some teach today that Ben Franklin was a Deist, his statements make clear that was not the case. As he, himself, said and then recorded in his own handwriting of the speech he gave, he said:

I have lived, sir, a long time, but the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth. God governs in the affairs of men, and if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it possible an empire could rise without His aid?

Franklin said to the Constitutional Convention, as he went on:

We have been assured, sir, in the sacred writing that, unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.

He said:

I also firmly believe that without His concurring aid, we shall succeed in our political building no better than the builders of Babel.

When God was telling Hosea why he was mad at the Children of Israel, I looked at different translations. One basically had him saying: because they have chosen leaders who are not my choice.

A Nation is responsible for the leaders they select, and it doesn't matter that John Kerry was rejected by the Nation to be the national spokesperson and national President because, when he is Secretary of State and he makes statements that hurt our dearest allies, then we, as a Nation, will be accountable for his missteps and mistakes in judgment.

We have an obligation to demand better from our leaders. It is a scandal with regard to the Veterans Administration, and for anyone to stand up and say, wow, I had no idea that these problems were going on, stretches the bounds of credibility when that same person said, back in 2008, in condemnation of the Bush administration, that they were not doing enough for our veterans, and condemned the Bush administration and made clear that: when I get in office, I will clear up

these problems, I will take care of our veterans.

So as a former judge, those statements—prior statements against interest—would be allowed into evidence to show that something that was said yesterday was not truthful because the mental awareness was shown in 2008, was also shown by statements in 2009, 2010, and then we find out there was a document reflecting that there were these problems with the Veterans Administration.

Our veterans deserve better. I was in the Army for 4 years. I don't deserve better. I never saw combat.

I still think we should have, in 1979—I still feel guilty that, because we were not sent to respond at all to an act of war, in 1979, that thousands of Americans have died because we didn't take a stand in '79, so they got stronger and stronger and stronger until they have gotten to the place that the Taliban takes over Afghanistan.

□ 1315

You have a renegade regime in Iran that President Carter welcomed in, the Ayatollah Khomeini, as a man of peace. And, of course, it makes sense that the policies of this administration are as they are, when you have someone who is a featured speaker at the great tribute to Ayatollah Khomeini as the man of vision and peace.

Well, he is one of the top advisers, even as I speak, at the Department of Homeland Security. He is giving advice, as are others who were named as being members of the Muslim Brotherhood by a periodical in Egypt in December of 2012 in which they were bragging about the top officials in the Obama administration who are members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Perhaps that explains why this administration has remained so loyal to the Muslim Brotherhood abroad, such that moderate Muslims, as you travel abroad, ask you: Why are you supporting your enemy? The Muslim Brotherhood wants to eliminate everything but radical Islam in America and in the world. Why are you helping them? They are your enemy. They are behind the attacks that have been made on the United States. Why are you helping them?

Mr. Speaker, in Libya, where a former terrorist supporter had reigned since 2003—and, as some Israelis had said: He was the best help you had, besides us, on identifying and eliminating radical Islam and terrorism, but yet you took him out. And we did that with our air cover and the provision of weapons to rebels that we knew had al Qaeda in them. It turns out that they were far stronger than we knew, which was why some of us were saying don't be helping the rebels in Libya. We know they have got al Qaeda in them. Yet we helped them.

As you travel abroad, you find people saying: You are still helping your enemy. We are worried you are going to turn on us next. You turn on your

allies. You punish your allies, and you reward your enemies. What kind of foreign policy is that? It never works. You will not win over people that hate you by giving them money and arms. They don't think you are a wonderful country because you have given them money and arms. They know you are crazy and you need to be wiped off the planet because you don't deserve to be a superpower. You are too stupid. And you give your people too much freedom, which allows them to choose some other religion than radical Islam.

Moderate Muslims around the world do not want radical Islam reigning over them, and that is why the people of Egypt rose up. And if this administration would do anything to show a powerful support for the nearly double the millions of people that allegedly voted for Morsi to be President, that came out and signed a petition, the two or three times as many millions came to the street demanding his removal as he said voted for him. There were fraud allegations. But from talking to the Egyptians, apparently Morsi had made it clear that if anybody objected to his win of the election, they would, as they said, "burn Egypt down."

The people who are in charge in Egypt don't want radical Islam's return. But when you talk to them, you find out that one of their biggest problems—well, two of their biggest problems—is on their west, in the eastern area of Libya, since this administration made sure Qadhafi was eliminated. Now terrorist training camps, like the Taliban had in Afghanistan, are now in Libya. And they come in and out of Egypt. And because of this administration's support for Morsi, he was able to militarize and weaponize the Sinai like it had never been weaponized before, making it more of a threat to Israel and making it more of a threat to the lovers of peace in Egypt.

There are consequences, even for those in this country who object to what the administration has done when they don't rise up and use their voices to make clear to this administration, through elections and through vocal objections, that they are making a huge mistake, and if they don't support lovers of liberty and Christian allies and Jewish allies that there will be a great amount to pay in the next election. And when that is made clear, I find my friends across the aisle get very responsive to the American people because—apparently, something that is a truth in America, as in other places—when someone is elected to a position they pursued, they like to stay in that position.

Some of us wonder at times if it is worth it. But as I have been told before: You have got to stay; this is where the fight is.

Well, I would also submit the fight is across America, for people to wake up, stop the apathy, and make it clear to those in this administration, to those in charge, that you are not going to stand for the kind of things that are

going on. And when it is made clear that we will not, as a Nation, tolerate what this administration has been allowing and looking the other way on, in the Veterans Administration, then things will change. But not until then. And when it is made clear to this administration that ObamaCare is a threat to seniors—it did cut \$716 billion from Medicare, which means they are not going to get the health care they need—when you are spending billions of dollars to hire IRS agents and navigators, more bureaucrats, then that is billions of dollars that will not be saving the lives of people that need lifesaving medications, need lifesaving procedures. Americans have got to wake up and demand better; and when they do, they will get it.

But I also want to touch on the USA FREEDOM Act, as it was labeled. I had an amendment. Though I applauded the work that was done by my friend from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER) to negotiate an agreement, I still had the same concern I had back in 2005 and 2006 as a freshman. At that time, I brought it to the attention of the Gonzales Justice Department. I brought it to the attention of the Bush administration that I am concerned about this part in the PATRIOT Act where it says, like in section 215, that you can go after anybody in “an investigation to obtain foreign intelligence information not concerning a United States person or to protect against international terrorism.”

So in both of those cases, they have to involve a foreign entity, a foreign agent, a foreign country, a foreign group of some kind, international terrorism. Those have to be involved for the PATRIOT Act to apply because as, apparently, Congress was told when the PATRIOT Act was passed back in desperation after 9/11/2001, we have got to protect against international terrorism, foreign agents, people who are dealing with foreign agents. That is what it was for.

So this third part concerned me because it says, or to protect against “clandestine intelligence activities.” “Clandestine intelligence activities,” what does that mean? It is very vague. And it doesn’t say “foreign.” It doesn’t say “international.” And since we were told that we are not allowed to just go gather information about American citizens, then this should have the word “foreign” or “international” in there.

So my amendment to the USA FREEDOM Act that would amend this part in there. It dealt with that, the amendment that was fought against by my friend from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER). They had too perfect of a cake that they had baked, and they, as MacArthur Park says, “may never have the recipe again. Oh, no.” They couldn’t allow a change to their recipe. So they didn’t allow any reference to “foreign” or “international.”

And the other references within the PATRIOT Act and the other references,

like in 18 U.S.C. 1842 talks about to obtain “foreign intelligence information not concerning a United States person” or “to protect against international terrorism or clandestine intelligence activities.” So it needed the word “foreign” or “international” somehow in there. I provided that, but the proponents of the USA FREEDOM Act did not want it in.

Although my amendment originally passed in committee, it was revoted on a voice vote quickly after we were coming back from a vote on the floor and taken out. And although a majority of those in the Rules Committee said that my amendment needed to be in the law to protect it and to protect American citizens, when the rule came out, the rule said that my amendment was not going to be allowed to have a vote.

So I had to vote against the USA FREEDOM Act because this is a gaping hole that allows the Federal Government to go after and spy on American citizens who have no contact with any foreign government, any foreign agent, have no ties at all to international terrorism, haven’t necessarily ever even thought about terrorism. But with this, if they can be alleged to have engaged in any type of clandestine intelligence activities, you can go after them and spy on them.

And what does that mean? Well, I have asked the question, and I have not gotten any satisfactory answer—any answer, really. Well, does that mean, if somebody looks over a fence into a Federal enclave, that that is trying to get intelligence and that might invoke this provision of the PATRIOT Act? Or how about if someone mistakenly goes to a Web site, does that invoke this provision that allows you to go after them? And I haven’t gotten a good answer, and I haven’t been told how this has been applied. I was hoping to get an answer that it has never been used, but I haven’t gotten that either.

As a result, I had to vote against the USA FREEDOM Act because I didn’t want my name on a bill that leaves a hole this large, allowing the Federal Government to go after American citizens who have never even thought about terrorism and have never had any contact with a foreign agent.

So, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to reiterate again that I think we will suffer if, having been given so much more freedom, more assets than any nation in the history of the world, we do not stand up for Jews and Christians being persecuted around the world.

We have clearly gone to war and lost human life and limb on behalf of protecting Muslims in the world. It is time that we also stood for Christians and Jews around the world.

I never thought I would see anti-Semitism arise in my lifetime like it has. On our college campuses in the name of open-mindedness, they have become anti-Semitic and racist, anti-Israeli. We have got to demand better from this administration, and we have

got to stand up for those Jews and Christians who are being persecuted and oppressed in greater numbers than ever before.

And with that, I yield back the balance of my time.

VETERANS’ BENEFITS SCANDAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker’s announced policy of January 3, 2013, the gentleman from California (Mr. LAMALFA) is recognized for the balance of the hour as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, this is a conversation that has been a long time coming. I am in my first term here in the House of Representatives, and soon after becoming a Federal Representative, it became very apparent to me that our veterans in California, in our districts, and all across the country really need a lot more of our help, as Members of Congress, as our staff both in our districts and even in D.C. can do for us for the veterans.

You have seen the revelations here lately that have finally gotten the attention of the American public, with what has been going on in Arizona, previously Pittsburgh with Legionnaires’ disease, and the many other revelations about how poorly our veterans are being treated in this country once they have served for us and have come home, expecting the things that they were promised before they made that service for us.

□ 1330

For example, revelations about secret waiting lists in the Veterans Administration as we have seen in Arizona. They have shocked most Americans here in recent weeks.

Today, I speak out on an even bigger crisis within the VA system, and that is the monumental failure of the Oakland, California, Veterans Benefits Administration.

Most of our veterans must run through this nightmarish gauntlet before they can even hope to be added to the secret waiting list at a Veterans Administration medical facility.

Here on the floor we talk a lot about claims backlogs often, and we have seen mountains of paper files. Our inevitable solution always seems to be to give them more money to fix the problem. Well, the Congress, with the American taxpayers’ dollars, has funded VA pretty adequately. We have made an effort here recently to try to help catch up with the backlog with the funding required. We were then issued cheerful responses of decreases in processing times that are systematically manipulated by upper level officials at VA in order to show progress to make us go away.

Right now, the Oakland office boasts that they have no claims over 125 days old. In reality, tens of thousands of the Oakland VA are trapped in a cycle many veterans call “delay, deny and wait until they die.”